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ABSTRACT

This very brief paper summarizes 20 major findings of research on 3000 gifted children over 19 years at the Gifted Development Center (Denver, Colorado). Among findings are: (1) there are more highly gifted children than previously recognized; (2) when one child is gifted, the chances are great that all siblings are gifted; (3) second children are recognized as gifted much less frequently than first-born or only children; (4) parents' IQ scores are usually within 10 points of their children's, grandparents' IQ scores are often within 10 points of their grandchildren's; (5) parents are excellent identifiers of giftedness in their children; (6) IQ test norms are biased against gifted children; (7) many cases of underachievement are linked to chronic early ear infections; (8) gifted children with hidden learning disabilities are much more prevalent than previously recognized; (9) over 60 percent of gifted children are introverted compared with 30 percent of the general population; and (10) gifted children have better social adjustment in classes with children like themselves. (DB)

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What We Have Learned About Gifted Children 1979-1997

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By concentrating totally on the gifted population, the Gifted Development Center has acquired a considerable amount of knowledge about the development of giftedness. Here are some of the highlights of what we have learned in 19 years from 3,000 children:

There are many more highly gifted children in the population than anyone realizes. We have found over 300 children above 160 IQ, the largest sample in this IQ range ever studied. (If your child is in this IQ range, and you are interested in participating in our study, please send us a copy of your child's report.)

As many girls as boys (ages 3 - 12) test above 180 IQ; however, 98% of eminent individuals are male. This inequity has been blamed for thousands of years on the lack of innate intelligence in females. The test which proves that there are equal numbers of males and females in the highest IQ ranges is no longer in use in school districts; and IQ testing itself has come under serious attack. If the trend continues, there will be no way to prove that girls are as smart as boys because girls are socialized into hiding their abilities and valuing their appearance and social skills more than their intelligence and achievement.

Where one child in the family is found to be gifted, the chances are great that all members of the family are gifted. Brothers and sisters are usually within 5 or 10 points in ability. We studied 148 sets of siblings and found that over 1/3 were within 5 points of each other, over 3/5 were within 10 points, and almost 3/4 were within 13 points.

Second children are recognized as gifted much less frequently than first-borns or only children. Even the first-born identical twin has a greater chance of being accepted in a gifted program than the second-born!

Parents' IQ scores, when known, are usually within 10 points of their children's; grandparents' IQ scores are often within 10 points of their grandchildren's.

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Gifted children's IQ scores become depressed at approximately 9 years due to ceiling effects of the test. The ideal age for testing is between 4 and 8.

Parents are excellent identifiers of giftedness in their children: 84% of the children who fit 3/4 of the characteristics in our intake procedure, according to parental judgment, test at least in the superior range. Over 95% show giftedness in at least one area, but are asynchronous in their development, and their weaknesses depress their IQ scores.

Giftedness can be observed in the first three years by rapid progression through the developmental milestones.

IQ test norms are biased against gifted children. The same raw score yields an IQ score for average children approximately 8 points lower in 1991 than in 1960, whereas for gifted children the difference is 31 points--a loss of one IQ point per year. Because of their low ceilings, none of the current tests provides valid IQ scores for highly gifted children.

Many cases of underachievement are linked to chronic early ear infections (9 or more in the first three years), with residual effects of auditory sequential processing deficits. Spelling, arithmetic, handwriting, rote memorization, attention, and motivation to do written work are all typically affected.

Highly gifted children, creative children, mathematically talented children, children with attention deficits, learning disabled children, culturally diverse children, and underachievers often are visual-spatial learners who require different teaching methods. We have developed methods of diagnosing this learning pattern and effective strategies for teaching visual-spatial learners.

Gifted children with hidden learning disabilities (dual exceptionalities) are much more prevalent in the population than anyone realizes; one-sixth of the gifted children who come to us for testing have some type of learning disability--usually undetected before the assessment.

Children with dual exceptionalities usually have at least one parent with the same learning pattern. Visual-spatial learners and children with dual exceptionalities tend to get smarter as they get older and often become successful adults in fields such as technology, architecture, engineering, aeronautics, mathematics, science, fine arts and business leadership.

Over 60% of gifted children are introverted compared with 30% of the general population. Over 75% of highly gifted children are introverted. Introversion correlates with introspection, reflection, the ability to inhibit aggression, deep sensitivity, moral development, high academic

achievement, scholarly contributions, leadership in academic and aesthetic fields in adult life, and smoother passage through midlife; however, it is very likely to be misunderstood and "corrected" in children.

Perfectionism, sensitivity and intensity are three personality traits associated with giftedness. They are derived from the complexity of the child's cognitive and emotional development. According to Dabrowski's theory, these traits are indicative of potential for high moral values in adult life. The brighter the child, the earlier and more profound is his or her concern with moral issues.

Gifted girls and gifted boys have different coping mechanisms and are likely to face different problems. Gifted girls hide their abilities and learn to blend in with other children. In elementary school they direct their mental energies into developing social relationships; in junior high school they are valued for their appearance and sociability rather than for their intelligence. Gifted boys are often considered "immature" and may be held back in school if they cannot socialize with children their own age with whom they have no common interests.

Mildly, moderately, highly and extraordinarily gifted children are as different from each other as mildly, moderately, severely and profoundly retarded children are from each other, but the differences among levels of giftedness are rarely recognized.

Gifted children have better social adjustment in classes with children like themselves; the brighter the child, the lower the child's social self-concept in regular classrooms. Social self-concept immediately improves when children are placed with true peers in special classes.

There are more poor gifted children than there are rich gifted children. Therefore, when attempts are made to eliminate programs for the gifted on the basis that they are "elitist," it is the poor who suffer the most.